



Take 5

For Safety



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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Safe on the slopes

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Hitting the slopes on skis or snowboards can mean entirely different things, depending on how you think about safety.

Of all the people who ski and snowboard each year, only a few are killed — but thousands are injured, many seriously.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, nearly 140,000 snowboarders sought medical treatment for injuries in 2009, with a near equal number for skiers. That's more than a quarter million people who were injured on the snow!

According to the National Ski Areas Association, an average of 40 people died while skiing or snowboarding every year during the past decade. During the 2009-2010 season, 38 fatalities occurred out of the 59.8 million skiers and snowboarders who hit the slopes. Serious injuries, including paralysis and head trauma, occur at a rate of about 43 people per year, NSAA figures show.

Such grim statistics prove it's smart to think safety when participating in these demanding sports. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons offers these tips for staying injury-free while participating in winter sports:

- Before beginning, perform light exercise for three to five minutes and slowly stretch muscles.
- Never imitate stunts seen on television. If you have children watching these events, make sure they understand the dangers associated with mimicking professional athletes.
- Never participate in extreme sports alone. Have a partner to assist you and a communication device to call for help in case you are injured.
- Wear appropriate protective gear such as goggles, helmets, gloves and padding.
- Wear several layers of light, loose, water- and wind-resistant clothing.

- Take frequent breaks to avoid dehydration and overheating. Avoid alcohol because it can increase your chances of hypothermia.
- Pay attention to weather warnings.

Other tips for playing safe in the snow include:

- Get in shape. You'll enjoy skiing more if you're physically fit.
- Obtain proper equipment. Be sure to have your ski or snowboard bindings adjusted correctly at a local ski shop. You can rent good ski or snowboarding equipment at many resorts.
- When buying skiwear, look for fabric that is water and wind resistant. Look for wind flaps to shield zippers, snug cuffs at wrists and ankles, collars that can be snuggled up to the chin and drawstrings that can be adjusted for comfort and keep the wind out. Be sure to buy quality clothing and products.
- Dress in layers. Layering allows you to accommodate your body's constantly changing temperature.
- Be prepared. Mother Nature has a vote. Bring a headband or hat to the slopes. Wear gloves or mittens (mittens are usually a better option for those susceptible to cold hands).
- Wear sun protection. The sun reflects off snow and is stronger than you think, even on cloudy days.
- Always wear eye protection. Have sunglasses and goggles with you. Skiing and snowboarding are a lot more fun when you can see.

For more information on winter safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

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